

WRITING GUIDE: 7 Ways to Paraphrase

Paraphrasing is writing down an author's ideas in your own words. It is not simply substituting the author's exact words with synonyms. A successful paraphrase is different from the original text in vocabulary and style but still contains the author's main ideas. Paraphrasing is NOT a direct copy of the text. If you directly copy the text without including a citation you are PLAGIARIZING.

The original passage:

"Artistic, diverse and ever-changing, Vancouver is a hub of cultural activity. The fact that the city boasts a number of notable cultural institutions, such as the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Vancouver Opera, is known to many" (Lang 20).

A good paraphrase:

Vancouver is a major cultural centre on Canada's west coast. The Vancouver Art Gallery and the Vancouver Opera are just two examples of its many famous cultural venues (Lang 20).

NOT A PARAPHRASE – potential plagiarism


Creative and varied, Vancouver has a lot of culture. The idea that Vancouver has several cultural centres, like the Vancouver art gallery and the Vancouver opera, is common knowledge to everyone (Lang 20).


*****IMPORTANT** *Gaining knowledge of English vocabulary as well as grammatical terms will greatly improve your ability to paraphrase. While practicing paraphrasing, it is better to use an English dictionary and an English grammar book rather than a translation app or device.*


BEFORE YOU BEGIN YOUR PARAPHRASE, SIMPLIFY

Eliminate wordiness:

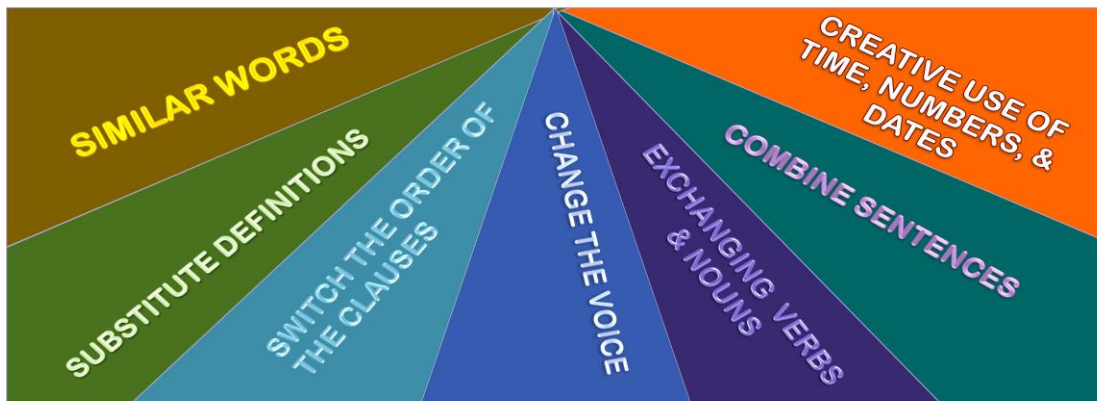
- Learning new words is great, but if you use too many, your paraphrase will not be successful and will not match your regular writing style.
- Focus on the details that are important for **your essay**, not on reporting everything the original author has said.

 **Keep Keywords:** names of theories, places, people – terms that the original author uses repeatedly in the original text.

 **Focus on ideas:** paraphrase the author's ideas instead of replacing words with synonyms.

 **Simplify your explanation:** Explain the ideas as if you were telling a friend who has not read the original text.

7 Ways to Paraphrase



Here are 7 different ways to write a paraphrase. **USE A COMBINATION OF TECHNIQUES** to create your paraphrase. **DON'T JUST USE SYNONYMS.** Practice using different techniques to become comfortable with them and develop your paraphrasing skills.

1. Similar words

Try to find synonyms for verbs and adjectives for the words used in the original source or your simplified version of the source.

- Use an ENGLISH THESAURUS AND ENGLISH DICTIONARY to check the meaning of the synonyms
 - If you use a translation program or dictionary you will not get accurate word choices.
 - MS Word has a Thesaurus (dictionary of synonyms) built into the program. You can find it under the “Review” tab on MS Word 2007 & later.
- Try NOT to use too many new words – it is great to improve your vocabulary but if you don’t understand the meaning of those words, your paraphrase may not have the same meaning as the original source (NOT GOOD!)

Let’s take another look at our first paraphrasing example:

The original passage:

- “Artistic, diverse and ever-changing, Vancouver is a hub of cultural activity. The fact that the city boasts a number of notable cultural institutions, such as the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Vancouver Opera, is known to many” (Lang 20).

The paraphrase:

- Vancouver is a major cultural centre on Canada's west coast. The Vancouver Art Gallery and the Vancouver Opera are just two examples of its many famous cultural venues (Lang 20).
 - "cultural centre" instead of "hub of cultural activity"
 - "Venues" instead of "institutions" – venue means a place that people go to, so it works in this paraphrase as a substitute for institutions. It might not work in all contexts, however, which is why it is important to use English language dictionaries.

2. Substituting Definitions

Some key words in the original text may be replaced by their definitions.

Example:

- **Original:** The defendant waited anxiously for the jury's verdict at his murder trial.
- **Paraphrase:** The accused murderer nervously waited for the final judgement at his trial.
 - The defendant in a trial is a person who has been accused of committing a crime.
 - Final judgement is the definition of verdict.

3. Switching the Order of Clauses

Rewriting a sentence by switching the order of the original clauses is a great way to begin a paraphrase. This step ensures that you have to adjust the grammar and will help you avoid plagiarising.

Take a look one of our earlier examples again:

- Notice that in this paraphrase the second sentence from the original text has become the first clause in the paraphrased sentence.
- Notice also that there are some changes in the grammar of the sentence.

Example:

- **Original Source:** Barack Obama says he wants to elevate the public discourse, yet here he is, hosting the loons and the radicals, the pranksters and the protesters. Anyone with Internet access can put a petition on the federal mainframe (Scherer 36).
- **Paraphrase:** The government's websites have attracted the attention of all sorts of fanatics, activists and jokesters as a result of President Obama's desire to improve civic dialogue (Scherer 36).

4. Change the Voice

Change the voice of the original sentences. If the voice is active try making the paraphrase passive. If the voice is passive try making the paraphrase active.

- Active voice means the subject performs the action(verb)
- Passive voice means the subject does not perform the action

Examples:

- **Original Source:** The economy is suffering because of the bank's poor judgment (Passive)
- **Paraphrase:** The bank's bad decisions caused the economy to crumble. (Active)
- **Original Source:** The team won because Jones scored the winning goal in the last minute of the game. (Active)
- **Paraphrase:** Jones' last minute goal allowed the team to win. (Passive)

5. Exchanging Verbs & Nouns

Another way to change the voice in a paraphrase is to switch verbs in the original text to their noun forms in your paraphrase. You can also try switching nouns into verbs that have the same or similar meaning.

Examples:

- **Original source:** The researchers started their investigation of the work habits of teenagers last week. (noun)
- **Paraphrase:** The researchers recently investigated youth work ethic. (verb)
- **Original source:** Sami insisted on the truth even if it might cause her pain. (verb)
- **Paraphrase:** Sami's insistence on honesty, no matter the personal cost, makes her an admirable character in this novel. (noun)

6. Combine Sentences

Combining sentences from the original text, using conjunctions or relative clauses is another great way to preserve the original ideas, while changing the structure of the original material.

This method requires 2 stages: 1) combining the original sentences, 2) rewording the combined sentence so that it is a paraphrase and not a direct quote.

Using Conjunctions:

When combining two sentences, here are some things to remember about selecting which word to use:

- **For**, tells us the reason
- **Because**, also tells us the reason
- **And**, means addition
- **Nor**, is negative
- **But**, shows contrast
- **Or**, gives another reason or choice
- **Yet**, also shows contrast
- **So**, tells us the result

Examples:

- **Original source:** The initial stages of the experiment involved sorting through potential test subjects. The scientists had to ensure there were sufficient representatives from each gender, age group and ethnicity.
 - **Paraphrase Step 1:** The initial stages of the experiment involved sorting through potential test subjects because the scientists had to ensure there were sufficient representatives from each gender, age group and ethnicity.
 - **Paraphrase Step 2:** Before any actual testing began, the scientists reviewed possible participants because a successful experiment depends on their subjects representing a good cross-section of the entire population.
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- **Original source:** On the one hand, John seems like a total loser. On the other hand, he's a very loving father.
- **Paraphrase Step 1:** On the one hand, John seems like a total loser, yet on the other hand, he's a very loving father.
- **Paraphrase Step 2:** John is an affectionate father, yet he doesn't seem to be successful in other areas of his life.

Using Relative Clauses:

Combining two sentences with relative clauses involves using one of three relative pronouns: "which", "that", or "who". Typically, if we are referring to a person or people, we use 'who'.

Examples:

- **Original source:** Ballroom dancing is an enjoyable pastime. It is loved by many young people.
- **Paraphrase Step 1:** Ballroom dancing is an enjoyable pastime that is loved by many young people.
- **Paraphrase Step 2:** One fun activity that many teens really enjoy is ballroom dancing.

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- **Original source:** Math was the hardest subject for me at school. I never liked math.
 - **Paraphrase Step 1:** Math was the hardest subject for me at school, which is why I never liked math.
 - **Paraphrase Step 2:** Math was the subject I found the most challenging, which is why I never really enjoyed it.
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- **Original source:** Stephen B. Hawking is a greatly admired scientist. He is famous for his work in theoretical physics.
- **Paraphrase Step 1:** Stephen B. Hawking is a greatly admired scientist who is famous for his work in theoretical physics.
- **Paraphrase Step 2:** One of the most distinguished scientists of our age is Stephen B. Hawking, who is best known for his ground breaking work in theoretical physics.

7. Creative use of Time, Numbers & Dates

In English there are different ways to express numbers, statistics, dates and times. Be creative! Depending on how important the numbers are, you can choose to be more or less detailed in your expressions.

Time

There are different ways to express time. You can convert time into different units. For example:

Weeks could be expressed in months or days or vice versa

- 12 weeks = 3 months = 84 days

Days may be expressed in hours

- 3 days ago = 72 hours

Time can also be expressed in more general terms

- 10 a.m. could be described as “mid-morning” or before noon.
- 2 p.m. could be in the afternoon
- Noon could be in the middle of the day
- Night times could be expressed as before/after sunset or midnight
- Very early morning could be described as before dawn or sunrise.

Numbers & Statistics

In English there are different ways to express multiples.

- 2 might be expressed as: a couple, twice, double.
- 3 might be expressed as: a trio, or triple

Statistics can be reversed:

- For Example:
 - If a statistic says 60% of people **did** something that means 40% **didn't** do it
 - Conversely, if 50% voted **against**, then that means 50% voted **for** it.

Statistics can also be generalized:

- For Example:
 - If a statistic says 60.48% of eligible voters voted in the last election, you can say:
 - Just over 60% of eligible voters voted.
 - Almost 40% of eligible voters didn't vote.

Dates

- If the date isn't important to your essay, you may omit it.
- A specific year, such as 1989 can be expressed as the late 1980's.
 - It could also be expressed as **before** the 1990's.

Dates can also be expressed relative to an important, relevant historical figure.

- Example:
 - Space flight became a regular occurrence during the **Kennedy era**.
 - (i.e. Early 1960's when J.F. Kennedy was the U.S. President)

Dates can also be relative to a specific historical time period

- Examples:
 - Engines powered by water have been with us since the **Industrial Revolution**.
 - Human artistic expression dates back to the **Stone Age**, when pictures of successful hunts were painted on cave walls.

Remember: A successful paraphrase is about sharing the author's *ideas*, not using similar words.

For additional help, please make an appointment with a Writing & Learning Centre writing instructor at: <https://alexander.mywconline.com/>